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Chair: Ms. Miculescu (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 49: Assistance in mine action (continued)
(A/66/292)

1. **Mr. Nwosa** (Nigeria) said that, notwithstanding the role of the United Nations in mine action, and a visit to Nigeria in March 2011 by the Implementation Support Unit of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, all mine clearance in the country had been undertaken by the Government alone. No other States had provided help, and no financial assistance had been forthcoming from the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

2. Nevertheless, the Government had initiated a national programme on mine action, under which, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/84, all activities complied with International Mine Action Standards, and were gender-sensitive. Nigeria had established a mine action centre and a national stakeholders committee, organized a national sensitization workshop, and launched a national plan on victim assistance. The main elements of the plan were removal of landmines, mine-risk education, identification and empowerment of victims, capacity-building, and provision of business loans on concessionary terms. Under the national programme annual reports would be submitted to the United Nations. In 2010 the Government had budgeted \$5 million for those activities, which it intended to expand, and would welcome United Nations assistance.

Agenda item 52: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued) (A/66/13 and Add.1, A/66/222, A/66/296, A/66/318 and A/66/520)

3. **Mr. Assaraf** (Israel) said that he was surprised that the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in his briefing, had not mentioned the continuing rocket fire from Gaza.

4. He reiterated his Government's commitment to the Agency's humanitarian mission, and to the understandings expressed in the 1967 Comay-Micheltore exchange of letters between Israel and UNRWA. The Commissioner-General and other UNRWA officials had on numerous occasions described the close relationship and cooperation that they enjoyed with the Israeli authorities. That was the

day-to-day reality on the ground, in clear contrast to the text of the anti-Israeli, politicized draft resolution on the subject that the Committee would soon vote on.

5. The only goods that Israel prevented from entering Gaza were arms and material with dual-use applications. Israel's blockade of Gaza was solely intended to prevent the smuggling of arms to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations that operated with impunity in the area. Despite the constant rain of ever more sophisticated rockets, mortars and missiles from Gaza on Israeli civilians and its duty to stop the flow of weapons, the Israeli Government had continued to take steps to support the economy in the area. Additional changes had been made in February 2011 to implement the understandings reached between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Quartet representative Tony Blair. Israel had also taken measures to substantially improve the West Bank economy, including through the removal of hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints. Other measures had been taken to improve access and movement. At present, no civilian goods were prevented from entering Gaza through Israeli crossings. The result had been a significant increase in Gaza's gross domestic product.

6. Israel had approved 163 projects overseen by the international community in Gaza; requests for additional projects had been made, and more approvals were on the way. Nevertheless, 40 per cent of the approved projects had not yet been implemented. Since June 2010, Israel had approved 62 UNRWA education projects, including the construction of 42 new UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA claimed that there was an urgent need for more than 100 new schools in Gaza. Yet the Agency had not filed requests to have anywhere near that number of schools built and was far from completing the projects that had already been approved; in fact, UNRWA had not even begun construction on more than half of all the schools that had been approved.

7. Notwithstanding the successful cooperation between Israel and UNRWA, there had been unfortunate instances when UNRWA officials had acted contrary to the humanitarian mission of the Agency by making controversial political statements. Those ventures into political terrain undermined the Agency's neutrality and harmed its mission. UNRWA should focus its energies and financial resources on its humanitarian role and leave the realm of politics to others.

8. Many States had used the current debate to make inflammatory statements against Israel that had done little to support UNRWA or Palestinian refugees. No Arab country had figured among the Agency's major donors over the past 10 years. Israel hoped that its Arab neighbours would offer tangible support to the Palestinian people through meaningful contributions to organizations such as UNRWA, which actually received most of its support from Western countries.

9. The draft resolutions due to come before the Committee were politicized and biased. They ignored basic facts, such as the destructive role played by Hamas in the region. Hamas, which had been recognized as a terrorist organization by the European Union, the United States of America, and by others, had remained in control of the Gaza Strip since taking over the area in 2007. The organization had openly called for Israel's destruction and maintained Gaza as an epicentre of terrorism. Hamas also continued to violently disturb the efforts of the international community in Gaza, particularly the work of UNRWA. The draft resolutions that would come before the Committee made no mention of the violent takeover of the Gaza Strip, and ignored the rockets that continued to rain down on Israel civilians. And there was no discussion of the violence that Hamas continued to unleash against UNRWA.

10. Israel was committed to resolving the refugee problem as part of a comprehensive solution to the conflict, which could only be settled through direct negotiation and realistic compromises. Prime Minister Netanyahu had called again and again for direct negotiations to begin immediately without preconditions. He hoped the Palestinians would sit down at the negotiating table instead of simply offering the same empty rhetoric in international forums.

11. **Mr. Shaanika** (Namibia) said that UNRWA should receive additional funding from the United Nations regular budget. Assistance to refugees who had lived in camps for decades was vital. While strengthening UNRWA was critical to its operational success, the issue of occupation must not be forgotten, given that it was the major cause of the suffering of Palestinians. Namibia supported the admission of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member. The people of Palestine had the right to live in peace and security in a viable State — that was the path to a durable solution.

12. **Mr. Shakenov** (Kazakhstan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said that OIC was concerned that the expected deficit of UNRWA had become structural. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation supported the request for additional funds for UNRWA from the regular budget of the United Nations, as recommended in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA (A/65/705). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation was also concerned over the lack of progress with reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. The approval process implemented by Israeli authorities and difficulties at checkpoints severely restricted the flow of goods in and out of Gaza and should be abolished. His organization fully supported the Agency's efforts to provide both reconstructed and new shelters and schools. It strongly condemned the forced displacement of refugees and other Palestinians in the West Bank.

13. **Mr. Rey** (Switzerland) said that UNRWA should continue to fulfil its mandate in the best possible way, in cooperation with national and local authorities. That applied in particular to the Syrian Arab Republic, where the economic situation had deteriorated considerably over the past few months. With regard to Lebanon, he urged the authorities to effectively implement the legislation adopted in 2010 to facilitate access by refugees to employment opportunities.

14. Ongoing and systematic violations of international humanitarian law in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip, continued to negatively impact the basic human rights of Palestine refugees, and placed an additional financial burden on the donor community. Switzerland supported the recommendation of the Secretary-General for the provision of an additional \$5 million from the regular budget of the United Nations. His Government would support UNRWA in its efforts to expand its donor base and to implement new fund-raising strategies, and would maintain its financial commitment to UNRWA at the current level.

15. In a context of increasing funding difficulties, it was essential to optimize service delivery in order to reach vulnerable target groups with sustained quality services. Alternative approaches, such as the provision of cash to support sustainable poverty alleviation, could help to optimize efficiency and increase the impact of aid, as well as support local markets. Further awareness-raising and advocacy vis-à-vis all

stakeholders would be required for the implementation of such strategies. Switzerland welcomed the reported progress relating to organizational development and the ongoing reform strategy and was looking forward to reports of further improvements. His Government was ready to continue its support for the Agency's reform processes through different instruments such as earmarked contributions and strategic secondments.

16. Switzerland had played an active role in different bodies such as the Advisory Commission of UNRWA and, during 2011, as Chair of the Advisory Commission's Sub-Committee. Switzerland had done its best to facilitate frank discussion of sensitive issues, with the focus for the current year on budget and reform. Switzerland would continue to offer its services as a facilitator for constructive dialogue between UNRWA and the governmental institutions responsible for dealing with Palestine refugees.

17. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that Israel should immediately end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, and cease building the separation wall on occupied Palestinian land. She welcomed the measures taken by Israel to improve the importation of goods and construction materials into Gaza. Nevertheless, she reiterated Iceland's position that the blockade of Gaza was contrary to international humanitarian law and should be lifted immediately.

18. She commended Lebanon for the legislative amendments granting Palestine refugees a degree of access to the workforce and to Lebanese social security. She urged the Lebanese Government to fully implement the amendments and to extend them to additional professions.

19. The reconstruction of Nahr El-Bared Camp in Lebanon had enabled 317 families to return to their homes; however, there were still thousands of refugees living in temporary shelters who depended on UNRWA for their well-being. Access restrictions continued to suffocate Nahr El-Bared's once thriving economy, increasing the refugees' reliance on UNRWA. She urged the Lebanese authorities to continue to ease those restrictions. Iceland fully supported the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA, as well as its reform efforts.

20. **Mr. Al-Kuwari** (Qatar) praised the work done by UNRWA, especially in the area of health, social and education services. Despite all the Agency's efforts, the

Israeli authorities had continued to tighten the economic blockade against unarmed Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip. The inhumane blockade and the recent Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip had led to a deterioration in the humanitarian and living conditions of Palestine refugees in Gaza. The humanitarian situation of Palestine refugees in the rest of the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, had also worsened as a result of continued restrictions and other Israeli practices that violated international law, particularly international humanitarian law. His delegation called on the international community to deal firmly with the Israeli Government in order to compel it to refrain from military attacks on unarmed civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

21. A just solution to the Palestinian question must take into account the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people for a viable Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and for the right of return of Palestine refugees to their homes, with adequate compensation, as called for in General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Only then would the Palestine issue be resolved. Qatar welcomed the admission of the State of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

22. **Ms. Vivas Mendoza** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that her delegation welcomed the accession of the State of Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. The actions of the Israeli army in 1948 had constituted an ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The human tragedy of the Nakba had been met with complicit silence on the part of an international community that was ashamed of the Holocaust. The attempt to erase the memory of Palestine was evident in the establishment of illegal settlements, the confiscation of land, the evictions and demolitions in East Jerusalem and the obstacles to road travel.

23. The wall at the Gaza border and the obstacles to the efforts of UNRWA to rebuild homes, schools and hospitals were part of that same policy. The "memocide" had continued with the threat by a member State of UNESCO to cut its budget because it had dared to recognize the existence of Palestine. Palestine existed, however, and its history would be strengthened by the new refugee registration system that completed the first phase of the archiving project set up by the Agency. The work of UNRWA had a far-reaching positive impact on the lives of Palestine

refugees. The international community had a responsibility to work for a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, including through the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in order to guarantee the return of Palestinians to their lands and end the drama that had lasted for over 60 years.

24. **Mr. Abulhasan** (Kuwait), expressing grave concern about the deteriorating humanitarian and environmental situation in the Gaza Strip and the unjust measures imposed on the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation authorities, said that the lifting of the blockade should remain a priority for the United Nations.

25. After joining the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, Kuwait had increased its voluntary annual contribution to the Agency from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. He called on the international community to continue to support the Agency and urged donor countries to fulfil their commitments and help mobilize resources.

26. Palestine refugees had a right to return to their country in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Commending the Agency for its efforts, he reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people in its efforts to fulfil its internationally recognized rights.

27. **Ms. Pessôa** (Brazil) said that Brazil had shown its support for the Palestinian people by increasing its financial contribution to UNRWA in recent years in recognition of its complex mandate. Brazil welcomed the exchange of prisoners carried out in October 2011 and hoped that that positive development could be translated into further cooperation, in particular concerning the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. An immediate and sustained opening of crossings was imperative. The resumption of regular exports from Gaza was urgently needed.

28. Brazil was also concerned at the extremely vulnerable situation of the Palestine refugees in Lebanon. Having contributed to the reconstruction of Nahr El-Bared in 2010, Brazil regretted that progress with reconstruction and the return of residents had been limited by the lack of funding for the reconstruction project. Brazil commended the Lebanese Government for addressing the issue of access to the labour market by the refugee population; however, much more support was needed. Brazil was

concerned over the alarming financial situation of UNRWA. Her delegation welcomed the Agency's financial reforms and increased transparency. She urged Member States, in line with the conclusions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA, to support the recommendation to increase funding to UNRWA under the United Nations regular budget.

29. **Mr. Apakan** (Turkey) said that it had become clear that the serious funding challenges faced by UNRWA had become structural. Having chaired the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Turkey was aware of the problems facing the Agency. He urged all Member States to take into consideration the recommendations of the Working Group and to significantly increase voluntary assistance and contributions to the Agency. Turkey had doubled its contribution, and its bilateral assistance programme and joint projects would also continue.

30. All obstacles, both direct and indirect, to the work of UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory must be lifted, and the Agency must be given full access by the Israeli Government. The situation in Gaza continued to be an embarrassment to the international community. He called for the immediate lifting of the blockade and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). While UNRWA had performed admirably, providing much-needed services on the ground, without a just and viable resolution of the core issue of the refugees in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement, the plight of millions of exiled Palestinians could not effectively be addressed. Turkey strongly supported the realization of a just and lasting comprehensive peace in the region, based on a two-State solution. The State of Palestine should be recognized as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

31. **Mr. Chabi** (Morocco) pointed out that the high unemployment rate among Palestine refugees and the population growth had raised significant additional challenges for UNRWA as it attempted to fulfil its vital mandate. The restrictions on movement imposed on the refugees had continued to hinder economic development. The Agency played a critical role in the provision of education and health services, human development and empowerment of the refugee populations. Morocco welcomed the reform agenda being implemented by the Agency. The sustaining change plan deserved the full support of Member

States, since it catered to the needs of the most vulnerable categories among the refugees.

32. The Palestinian cause remained a national cause for the people of Morocco. As Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI had expressed early support for full membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations, including recognition of its sovereignty on the basis of the June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. His delegation welcomed the admission of the State of Palestine to UNESCO and hoped that Palestine would soon become a full Member of the United Nations as well. The Government of Morocco, as well as civil society organizations, had donated substantial amounts for projects benefiting the Palestine refugees.

33. **Mr. Mohammed Ishak** (Malaysia) commended UNRWA for its dedication in providing essential services to Palestine refugees. The root cause of the sufferings of the Palestine refugees was the unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel. Despite the so-called easing announced by the Government of Israel in June 2010, the illegal blockade continued to choke the livelihood of the Palestinians in Gaza and seriously impaired the Agency's reconstruction projects. Immediate steps should be taken in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the relevant provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in order to ensure the free flow of essential and commercial supplies, particularly construction materials, into Gaza. His delegation was concerned that UNRWA continued to be underfinanced. He called on States that were in a position to do so to consider contributing or increasing their contributions to the Agency's General Fund so as to enable it to continue its work, which was essential until such time as a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees was achieved, including their right to return and to fair compensation, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

34. **Ms. King** (Australia) said that her Government welcomed the continued emphasis by UNRWA on fiscal responsibility and organizational reform. Australia had contributed substantial amounts to UNRWA over the years and was planning a new five-year partnership with the Agency which would result in the disbursement of predictable levels of financial assistance. That assistance would be disbursed

"unearmarked" into the UNRWA General Fund. At the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Palestinian Territories in September 2011, Australia had announced plans to significantly increase contributions to Palestinian humanitarian and development activities. Australia strongly supported a negotiated two-State solution that would allow an independent Palestinian State to live side by side in security with Israel. Australia welcomed the Middle East Quartet's 23 September statement describing a timetable for negotiations and calling on parties to agree an agenda and to refrain from provocative actions. She urged both sides to return to negotiations urgently on final status issues and to refrain from actions that undermined trust. Australia would continue to support the establishment of a future Palestinian State.

35. **Mr. Gupta** (India) said that the immediate challenge facing UNRWA was the funding crisis; accordingly, India supported the efforts of UNRWA to enhance its donor base. While there had been some improvement in security-related restrictions on the West Bank and in the movement of humanitarian supplies and other products into Gaza, the remaining restrictions caused severe hardships for the Palestinian population and hindered the work of UNRWA. India supported the call for removal of restrictions on the movement of Agency staff and goods; in addition, further simplification of the approval process for transportation of humanitarian materials by UNRWA would greatly help the population in need. India also hoped that the amended labour legislation in Lebanon would be implemented expeditiously to ensure better employment opportunities for Palestine refugees.

36. His Government had continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. It had increased its annual contribution to UNRWA and had made a special contribution in response to a flash appeal in 2010. Over the last two years, India had also made substantial contributions as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. It had also undertaken joint projects with its partners in the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trust Fund in Palestine. India had been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace

Initiative and the Quartet road map. India looked forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal Member of the United Nations. It was critical for the international community to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to resume direct negotiations. In that context, India had noted the Quartet statement of 23 September and hoped that the timeline indicated in the statement would be realized, leading to an enduring resolution of all final status issues, including the refugee issue.

37. **Ms. Daher-Violides** (Lebanon) said that the primary goal of the Committee must remain the right of the refugees to return. UNRWA was the principal source of basic services for the Palestine refugees and thus, pending their return, the commitment of the international community to them through UNRWA was critical. Lebanon urged the donor community as a whole to mobilize the needed resources, particularly for the UNRWA General Fund. She also urged the General Assembly to consider additional financing for UNRWA from assessed contributions. The financial shortfalls of UNRWA were exacerbated by illegal Israeli port and related transit charges on its shipments entering the Gaza Strip and by the illegal blockade. Easing the blockade and not lifting it completely was unacceptable and remained a clear violation of the responsibilities of the occupying Power.

38. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Israeli occupation and its associated regime of closures, house demolitions, land confiscation, settlement activities and the racist separation wall continued to have an adverse effect on the Palestine refugees, limiting their access to UNRWA services and resources. UNRWA remained the partner of the Lebanese Government in providing for the just needs of the Palestine refugees in 12 camps and 16 refugee population centres across Lebanon. The Lebanese Government, despite its limited resources, spared no effort to improve the living conditions of the Palestine refugees. In August 2010, the Lebanese Parliament had passed amendments to employment legislation granting additional employment rights to Palestine refugees. Lebanon highly appreciated the work of UNRWA in the reconstruction of the Nahr El-Bared camp and welcomed the completion of its first phase. The plight of the Palestine refugees was a political issue and not just a humanitarian concern. Israel was fully responsible for all the suffering of the Palestine refugees and should respect their right of return, as an

inevitable step on the road to a just peace. For its part, the international community should compel Israel to comply with its obligations under international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law.

39. **Mr. Govender** (South Africa) said that the relative calm among the world's largest refugee community would not be possible without the critical interventions by and in support of UNRWA. His delegation was therefore dismayed by the response of the Permanent Representative of Israel to the Secretary-General as recorded in the report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (A/66/222, para. 3). In particular, his delegation objected to the Israeli argument that the Agency's mandate should include the active promotion in the Palestinian context of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees. In the absence of critical services provided by UNRWA directly to its beneficiaries, an already volatile region would have to deal with a desperate population deprived of all their basic human rights and human development.

40. UNRWA had made a substantive contribution in the areas of health care, education and vocational training, food aid and other forms of hardship assistance. Nevertheless, extreme poverty within the refugee camps was a matter of concern, especially at a time when the shortfall in the Agency's budget had doubled. South Africa had over the years continued its financial support for the work of the Agency and would additionally continue its political support for the Palestinian people, as well as its economic support, through the IBSA Trust Fund. At the bilateral level, South Africa would continue to support capacity-building programmes for the Palestinians. Member States should also increase funding for UNRWA from the United Nations regular budget. Ultimately, the alleviation of the ongoing suffering and plight of the Palestinian people lay in a long-term political solution that would enable the creation of a Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He welcomed the decision taken by the majority of member States at the General Conference of UNESCO to admit the State of Palestine as a member. As a member of the Security Council, South Africa would support the Palestinian application for membership of the United Nations.

41. **Ms. Moreno Guerra** (Cuba) said that Cuba demanded the immediate cessation of the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, the Israeli settlement activities and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against the defenceless civilian population. The cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza must be lifted immediately and without conditions. Cuba strongly supported Palestine's application for full membership of the United Nations and welcomed the recent decision by the General Conference of UNESCO to admit Palestine as a full member of that organization. The situation in the Gaza Strip was alarming. The road blocks and restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, including food and medicine, were causing serious harm to the Palestinian people. Cuba condemned that hostile policy, which had persisted despite the repeated calls of the international community and the many resolutions adopted by different United Nations bodies. UNRWA must receive the necessary support and guarantees to enable it to carry out its work and achieve its objectives. Cuba was concerned about the financial situation of UNRWA. Nevertheless, the illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories was still the main obstacle to a just and lasting peace throughout the region. The international community must not rest until the Palestinian people were able to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and sovereignty as an independent State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

42. **Mr. Al Zayani** (Bahrain) said that his delegation commended the efforts made by UNRWA, the Advisory Commission and host States. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had continued to deteriorate. UNRWA was hampered by Israeli restrictions and by a recurring budget deficit. In his letter to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA dated 22 June 2011 (A/66/13), the Advisory Commission had expressed deep concern that the separation barrier, closures, curfews and other restrictions on movement imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had led to further hardship for the affected population.

43. The Agency had made considerable progress in remedying its structural deficit by developing innovative programmes and activities drawing on expert help funded by donors. The organizational development reform had marked a successful

qualitative improvement in planning, service delivery, human resources management and communications technology. The Secretary-General's report on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA (A/65/705) acknowledged that the Agency's management reform process had reached an important landmark at the Geneva Conference on meeting the humanitarian needs of the Palestine refugees in the Near East hosted by the Government of Switzerland in June 2004.

44. The medium-term strategy for 2010-2015 was therefore of particular importance. The Advisory Commission had emphasized its support for sustaining the momentum of change within UNRWA with the aim of improving its effectiveness in delivering services to refugees in cooperation with host countries. Nevertheless, the situation remained critical. The Secretary-General's report noted that, despite having once again downsized its General Fund budget, UNRWA anticipated a funding shortfall of \$63 million.

45. His delegation commended all donors, particularly major donors, and hoped that UNRWA would secure larger donations in order to avoid any measures that could negatively affect its services. The international community's moral support for UNRWA gave cause for hope.

46. The refugee issue was, at its core, a political one; the Agency's continued existence was a result of failure to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which enshrined the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes. UNRWA would remain an indispensable organization pending a solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

47. **Mr. Nwosa** (Nigeria) said that the deplorable living conditions of Palestine refugees continued to be a scar on the collective conscience of humanity. His delegation objected to the ongoing denial and violation of the rights of Palestine refugees by the Israeli authorities and called for respect for humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant United Nations conventions. The budgetary constraints under which UNRWA had to work were a source of concern. While Nigeria recognized that the economic slowdown had made it necessary to exercise more financial discipline, austerity measures should not be exaggerated. The

impediments to the work of UNRWA should be viewed within the larger context of finding a lasting solution to the Middle East problem. Israel and Palestine should live side by side, in security and safety, within well-defined borders determined through a negotiated settlement. Israel should trade land for peace and be assured of its inalienable right to live with its Arab neighbours.

48. **Mr. Sugio** (Japan) said that Japan had begun to provide assistance to the Palestinians through UNRWA in 1953, even before its accession to the United Nations. The significant aid provided by his country to UNRWA was part of its efforts for the realization of peace in the Middle East. Japan had attached particular importance to assisting Palestine refugees in the area of human resources development through education and vocational training. In order to achieve a viable Palestinian State, it was essential for Palestinians to create solid economic and industrial foundations and develop administrative institutions and human resources. To that end, Japan would continue to support various projects in the Jordan Valley under the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. Japan hoped through that initiative to establish a good model for regional cooperation. Since 2007, Japan had also extended a series of non-project grants-in-aid to the Palestinian Authority to promote the Authority's economic and social development efforts. Japan had been pursuing coordinated efforts with East Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia in order to contribute to Palestinian state-building efforts. His Government welcomed the efforts that had been made by UNRWA to implement the ongoing organizational development process in order to improve the Agency's administration and operations. The recent visit to Japan by the Commissioner-General had helped to raise awareness among the Japanese people of the situation of Palestinian refugees and the activities of UNRWA.

49. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that Israel must ensure unrestricted mobility and non-interference in the activities of UNRWA so that it could perform its mandated responsibilities. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians continued to suffer major restrictions on movement, residence and other fundamental freedoms, while Israeli settlements expanded. UNRWA was supporting some of the most vulnerable and marginalized refugee communities. He welcome Palestine's admission to membership of UNESCO. His delegation called upon the international

community to come forward with generous contributions in response to the Commissioner-General's appeal for funding for the rehabilitation and emergency assistance programmes for the refugees in the Nahr El-Bared camp in Lebanon.

50. **Mr. Belkheir** (Libya) said that UNRWA faced a number of challenges, the most important of which were the settlement policies, arbitrary restrictions and military actions perpetrated by the Israeli occupation. Those activities had created a tragic situation for Palestinians, whose humanitarian, economic and social conditions had continued to deteriorate. The Israeli occupation authorities had committed clear violations of international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and international conventions. They must, without delay, lift the unjust, illegal and unethical blockade of the Gaza Strip, remove checkpoints between Palestinian populations and between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and dismantle the separation wall. Occupation, land seizures, settlement policies, house demolitions, expulsions, intimidation and settler violence all prevented the resolution of the refugee issue.

51. The issue of Palestine refugees was part of the broader problem created by a coercive colonial occupation. In accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly, any just and comprehensive settlement should uphold the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right of return, the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

52. UNRWA had a vital role to play in providing essential services to Palestine refugees. The international community, non-governmental organizations and international financial institutions should make further efforts to strengthen political support and garner financial resources for the Agency's work.

53. **Mr. Motanyane** (Lesotho) said that the inordinately lengthy period that the Palestine refugees had endured in refugee camps had had devastating social and psychological effects. The Palestinians suffered from armed conflict and all kinds of human rights abuses. The settlement policy deprived them of their land and made them vulnerable to displacement. UNRWA was finding it increasingly difficult to provide food and shelter for the Palestine refugees owing to the

blockade. The problem was compounded by the imposition of taxes and other levies on the Agency, which hampered the delivery of core services. The lifting of the blockade must be a priority. The funding gap in the UNRWA budget was of great concern to Lesotho, as it prevented the Agency from meeting the needs of the Palestine refugees. He encouraged current donors to increase their contributions to the Agency, and urged new donors to come forth. UNRWA must continue its work until justice was done and the Palestinians lived in their own land in peace and security.

54. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) thanked the delegation of Palestine for its support for the work of UNRWA. He had noted the comments made by the representative of Israel and wished to express his appreciation for the Israeli Government's support and for the measures taken to ease the blockade of Gaza.

55. In clarification, he noted that since the easing of the blockade, 18 projects authorized by Israel had been completed, including five schools; 16 were being implemented, including seven schools; a further 33 schools had been approved, and UNRWA was currently completing procedures prior to construction. Funding for projects was not forthcoming immediately; once approval had been received, the Agency had to find funding and complete tendering and other procedures before it could proceed. Thirty-nine projects were pending approval by the Government of Israel; of those, 32 were schools, one was a vocational training centre, and the rest were for refugee housing. The housing project was already largely funded. Only 26 requests for approval for schools had not yet been submitted; that was because UNRWA was waiting for the last batch to be approved before submitting a new request. The Agency had appealed to the authorities on the ground for an acceleration of procedures to further ease the blockade. That appeal had been well received by the military authorities concerned, which were working on simplified procedures. He shared the view of many speakers that the blockade was counterproductive for everyone in Gaza and the region, and that it was illegal under international law and therefore should be lifted.

56. He welcomed the support for a broadening of the rights of refugees in Lebanon. It was extremely important for the Government to approve the

implementation decree for the legislative amendments adopted by Parliament in 2010, so that UNRWA could start work on implementing broader rights for refugees, especially the right to work.

57. He welcomed the support for regular and predictable access in the Syrian Arab Republic in spite of the current difficult circumstances. He noted with appreciation the statement by the Syrian representative that his Government would continue to support UNRWA in the Syrian Arab Republic. He noted the universal support regarding the need for the funding of UNRWA to be regular and predictable. He commended those donors that had contributed resources in spite of difficulties, including new donors, emerging economies and Arab donors. He called for increased contributions in respect of core funding, and requested the support of all delegations in the Fifth Committee during its budget deliberations. The fact that all of the Agency's initiatives had increasing costs was regrettable, but unfortunately that was the cost of the political failure to achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict, including the question of refugees. The only possibility for moving on and giving almost 5 million refugees a chance for a real future was to find a political solution.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.